

# From Political Decisions to Change in the Classroom: Successful Implementation of Education Policy

Frode Nyhamn and Therese N. Hopfenbeck (Eds.)



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2014

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Thinkstock

**Design:**

Anagram Design

**Published in 2014 by:**

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Norway

**Printed by:**

Andvord Grafisk AS

**Order address:**

bestilling@utdanningsdirektoratet.no

ISBN 978-82-486-2017-4

**How to cite this publication:**

Nyhamn, F., & Hopfenbeck, T. (Eds.) *From political decisions to change in the classroom: successful implementation of education policy*. CIDREE Yearbook 2014. Oslo, Norway: Udir.

# Phased Implementation:

## Successful Alignment of Tools of Implementation to Improve Motivation and Mastery in Lower Secondary Schools in Norway

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### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and external reviewers for all feedback in the revising stages of this chapter."



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## Facts about Norway

- Population: 5,1 mill
  - Density: 16 persons per km<sup>2</sup>
  - Students per teacher: primary 10, secondary 10
  - Expenditure on education: 6,8 pst. of GDP
  - Teacher's salaries compared to other full-time tertiary-educated workers (ratio): 0,75
- .....

## ABSTRACT

Is one national implementation strategy better than another given similar conditions? Or: Is choosing an implementation strategy a way of altering its conditions? A Norwegian aphorism says that the forest stands although its trees changes. In this chapter we examine current implementation dynamics in Norway. We discuss how perceived changes fit long-term ('standing') national features of the education system, and how they may inform and play into the changing international landscape of travelling policies. In Norway, a phased implementation strategy is being used to implement the Strategy for Lower Secondary Education 2013-2017. The aim is to improve classroom instruction in lower secondary schools. The strategy is based on research indicating that student motivation for learning is at its lowest at this level of schooling. In this chapter we explain the idea of phased implementation. We describe stakeholder responsibilities and indicate how implementation tools are aligned across phases. Our perspectives are based on a survey among school leaders and school owners conducted Spring 2014. Findings show a surprisingly high degree of optimism in informants' responses given that former implementation research in Norway pointed to loose couplings between reform goals and local impact. We discuss benefits and challenges of the phased strategy, paying attention to aspects specific to Norway and to those shared by other CIDREE-members.

**Keywords:** Phased implementation, national implementation strategies, school improvement, lower secondary education

## INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in Norway as in Europe to understand how lower secondary education may enhance young students' motivation to learn. Research and statistics indicate that student motivation for learning is at its lowest in lower secondary school (e.g. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2011). School as a social institution is under continual observation in order to relate future competence demands, societal ideals, and classroom practices to meet the interests and abilities of today's young generation. Globalization has influenced a spread of reforms and assessment schemes that have had a profound impact on the work for curricular control in national education systems (e.g. Astiz, Wiseman & Baker, 2002). Scholars analyzing educational policy implementation today are concerned with understanding how different implementation strategies are selected, adjusted and maintained to fit each country's political conditions as well as the complexity of individual schools and lower secondary classrooms (McLaughlin, 1987; Honig, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer 2002). Educational policy in one country may inform policies in another, contributing to the current landscape of travelling policies and soft governance (Moos, 2009; Hopfenbeck et al., 2013; Mausethagen, 2013a). At the same time, large-scale comparative studies such as the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, TALIS2008 (Vibe, Aamodt, & Carlsten, 2009) and TALIS2013 (Carlsten, Caspersen, Vibe, & Aamodt, 2014) have confirmed that it is a valid concern for researchers to compare not only policy administration between nations (cf. Haft & Hopmann, 1991), but also the ways in which these nations select strategies for policy implementation. This chapter aims to contribute to the European exchange of implementation research by analyzing the first steps of a current implementation strategy for enhancing young students' motivation to learn in Norway.

## WHAT IS PHASED IMPLEMENTATION?

In the following, we identify the benefits and risks of phased implementation in education policy development based on initial findings from our evaluation of national tools aimed at supporting phased implementation. The most interesting question to ask is why phased implementation was selected in Norway in this particular case. First, however, we have to identify what phased implementation is. In this case it refers to an implementation strategy that allows change to occur in smaller steps by including more partners working in phases over an extended period of time to allow for "diffusion of innovations" (Rogers 1983). In terms of policy implementation theory, phased implementation is a distinct strategy for

administrating change in the school system in a phased rather than a full-scale or trial scheme approach (e.g. Stone 2004). The overall aim of educational change is distributed across the system in subsequent time slots. Experience from the first phase is integrated into the way implementation tools are administered for consecutive and partly overlapping groups of schools.

In Norway, this approach is currently being used as a mode of implementation for the Strategy for Lower Secondary Education 2013-2017, which is a joint effort to improve classroom management, numeracy, reading, and writing in lower secondary schools. All schools offering lower secondary education in Norway are divided into four groups which correspond to four phases of policy implementation throughout 2013-2017. The first group participated in 2013-2014, the second group started in the Fall of 2014, the third will begin in the Fall of 2015, and the final group will begin in the Fall of 2016. All four groups will have to work extensively with multiple partners on all levels in the education system, all working towards the overall aim of enhancing young students' motivation to learn.

### THE NORWEGIAN STRATEGY FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION 2013-2017

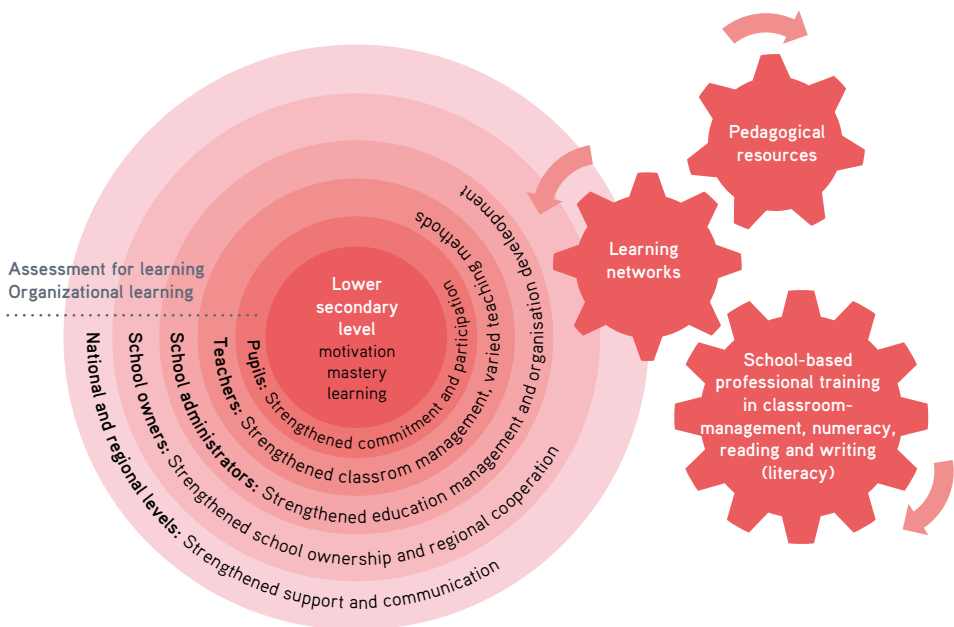
The Strategy for Lower Secondary Education 2013-2017 is the result of an ongoing political discussion in Norway regarding how to develop a diverse and inclusive school system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). Norway is well-known for the compulsory comprehensive school system it introduced over 250 years ago (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). The country's emphasis on inclusion and social-democratic welfare has had an impact on the way education policy is designed and implemented. Recent educational reforms in Norway include national tests and monitoring mechanisms to see if key outcomes are being achieved like most other countries in Europe (Mausethagen, 2013a). However, Norway has not established follow-up mechanisms such as high stakes incentives and rewards that are "characteristic of accountability policies in some other countries" (Hatch, 2013, p. 113). Therefore, Norway's attempt to develop a diverse and inclusive school system is not a top-down structure. The dual Norwegian accountability system that Hatch is describing is rather a case for capacity-building, which means that teachers' work integrates contact with stakeholders on all levels of the education system (Mausethagen, 2013b; Carlsten et al., 2014). As in all education systems, selecting a strategy for implementation means selecting a strategy to ensure that all implementing agents are equipped to understand



their practice and motivated to allow for change (Moos, 2009; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

The Norwegian strategy for lower secondary education 2013-2017 is presented in the document *Motivation and Mastery for Better Learning. Joint Effort to Improve Classroom Management, Numeracy, Reading and Writing* (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). There are many stakeholders involved (see Figure 1). They all have a responsibility to contribute in different ways to achieve the common objective of enhanced motivation and learning outcomes for the young students (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

FIGURE 1: STAKEHOLDERS, OBJECTIVES, AND NATIONAL SUPPORT TOOLS IN THE NORWEGIAN STRATEGY FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION 2013-2017 (CARLSTEN & MARKUSSEN, 2014).



(Based on Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). The six circles refer to aims for the overall scheme as well as for five main groups involved. The three meshing gears refer to the tools selected to drive the implementation. These represent the three main tools of support for the strategy stakeholders: School-based professional training in classroom management, reading, writing, and numeracy; pedagogical resources; and learning networks. The two bullet points to the left refer to two underlying principles in the Norwegian Strategy for Lower Secondary Education 2013-2017. In order to create a more practical and varied education, the government emphasizes the need for continuous assessment and for developing a good organizational culture.



Improving motivation and mastery in lower secondary level education in Norway is a government strategy aimed at strengthening this key level in the education system (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011). As mentioned, research and statistics indicate that student motivation for learning is at its lowest in lower secondary school (ibid). Research in Norway and internationally has shown that a focus on motivation, engagement, inclusion, and learning opportunities for all students at this level is crucial to ensure that students stay in school and achieve the formal education necessary for future employability and lifelong learning skills (Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011; Markussen, 2014; Rumberger, 2011).

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

In this implementation strategy, students are considered a resource that enhances quality in the lower secondary school. As they grow older, Norwegian students are gradually expected to take more responsibility for their own learning, to take the opportunity to participate in the governance of the school, and to communicate their expectations for the school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). Parents also play a decisive role in school development in Norway. In the framework for developing lower secondary education, parents are expected to set requirements, encourage and motivate their children to continue their efforts in lower secondary school, and actively participate in the relationship between the school and the home (ibid). Teachers are responsible for the students' educational and social development according to the strategy document for lower secondary schools. They are also expected to provide practical and varied instruction, adapted to the students' abilities (cf. Education Act, §3-1). School leaders are responsible for learning results and for developing a collectively oriented culture at the school by facilitating a stronger professional community through cooperation, reflection, and sharing of experience. Norwegian municipalities, as school owners, are responsible for fulfilling the students' right to primary and secondary education, cf. Section 13-1 of the Education Act, and therefore play a key role in the strategic leadership. At the national and regional level, teacher training institutions, national centres for educational support<sup>1</sup>, regional GNIST partnerships,<sup>2</sup> and 57 specifically

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<sup>1</sup>National centers for educational support have a national mandate to lead and coordinate the development of new and improved working methods and learning strategies in education, from the level of kindergarten to teacher education in Norway.

<sup>2</sup>The regional GNIST partnership is a broad commitment to improving the quality of teacher education and developing the teaching profession in Norway. The partnership is working to raise the status of teachers and to recruit good teachers for 21st century education.



trained counsellors have a key role in the realization of the phased implementation strategy. All in all, the phased implementation strategy seems to be selected in order to ensure the logical link between including all stakeholders into the pedagogical foundation of school-based development, and the long-term work at the national level for increasing student motivation.

Central to understanding the selection of the phased implementation strategy is also the features of the Norwegian educational system. Universal and equitable education based on a belief in free schooling is a strong feature of the Norwegian school system (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). With a large geographical area (385,252 square kilometres) but a relatively small and scattered population (5,109,059 by 01.01.2014), forty percent of primary and lower secondary schools are so small that children of different ages are taught in the same classroom. Primary and lower secondary levels are often combined in the same school. When it comes to coordinating the scattered educational system, Norway is a unitary state with a tradition of delegating a large part of the responsibility for school governance to its 428 municipalities. The characteristics of classrooms integrating all students under municipal authority in a system working with a traditional national curriculum is central to understanding the idea of phased implementation in our case.

### **A SHIFT IN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY?**

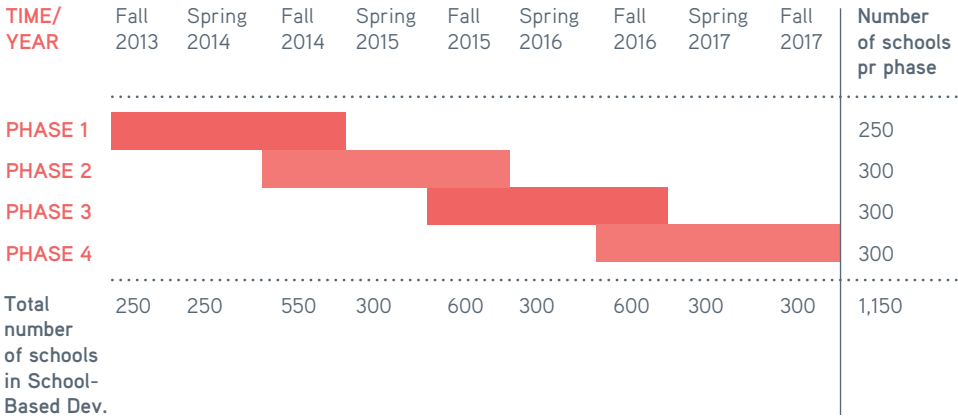
In earlier reform implementations, Norway initiated full-scale arrangements. Although with a strong tradition of trial schemes, these have to a large degree been based on a traditional governance strategy emphasizing a single-event curriculum change. It has been driven by legal and financial changes, and it has in many ways followed a traditional top-down New Public Management approach, asking “what works?” (Aasen et al., 2012; Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). In the current strategy, the government has responded to criticism from earlier policy evaluations by creating an explicit national implementation strategy that is aligned with the political strategy (Aasen et al., 2012; Ministry of Education and Research, 2013; Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). In this sense, the Norwegian implementation strategy seems to appear with the features of a knowledge-informed strategy, indicating a shift towards soft management (Postholm et al., 2013; Dyrkorn et al., 2014; see also Mausestagen, 2013b). Since 2013, participants in the Norwegian strategy for lower secondary education have been regularly invited to implementation seminars by the national authorities. The work

has been followed up by several agents before and after, such as scholars, counsellors and resource teachers working across schools and regions. This is quite different from the way in which earlier reform implementations were handled, where schools worked more independently often after having been served research in a seminar quite remote from their own classrooms. On the one hand, the focus on school-based development has been a part of Norwegian strategy for schooling since 2003. Phased implementation as a strategy ensuring learning networks are maintained over time and across all lower secondary schools, on the other hand, is more of an innovative act in Norway today.

**ORGANIZING THE PHASES**

There are several ways in which to organize a phased policy implementation. One example is a modular-based system, in which all units involved start with a core function module for implementing change (e.g., externally designed school evaluation tools) and then over time move on to more specialized modules (e.g., models of reading instruction). Another way of organizing the groups is by geographic location or by school function (e.g., by engaging school leaders before teachers). In Norway, the phased implementation strategy emphasizes schools

FIGURE 2: PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NORWEGIAN STRATEGY FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION 2013-2017 (CARLSTEN & MARKUSSEN 2014; BASED ON DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2013).<sup>3</sup>



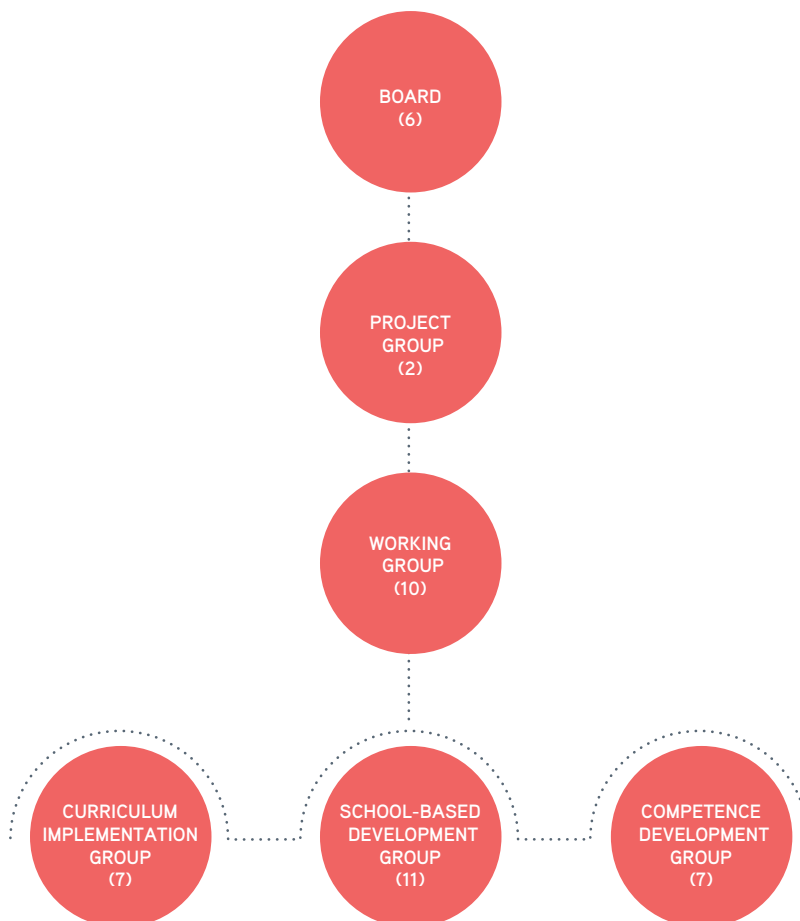
<sup>3</sup>The official figure operates with 1,150 as the total number of schools involved, but the program is in reality open for all 1,295 lower secondary schools, according to the Directorate for Education and Training.



as the main unit of change regardless of geography and school size. Schools offering lower secondary education are divided into four groups which include four defined phases of three semesters (Figure 2).

The aim in this phased strategy is to cover all lower secondary schools (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Year) and combined schools (1<sup>st</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Year) in Norway. The functionality of each implementation phase is designed to avoid temporary solutions that could have

FIGURE 3: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NORWEGIAN STRATEGY FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION 2013-2017 (PERSONAL INFORMATION FROM THE NORWEGIAN DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2014). NUMBER OF PERSONS IN PARANTHESES.



been an outcome in a parallel- or direct full-scale changeover. One example is the establishment of counsellors when working towards the aim of developing learning networks (see support tool in Figure 1). In this scheme, the school owners in phase 1 were selected by the Directorate itself to ensure that the baseline was designed to inform the following phases. The selection of school owners was based on feedback from the teacher educator regions on who had the opportunity to start working with schools Fall 2013, along with results from a national survey of competence and capacity in this sector and a national survey on school owners' and schools' stated needs (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2014). The selection was also based on a dialogue with the county governors, and feedback from group meetings where all partners were involved (ibid). The strategy also included a pilot project (Postholm et al., 2013). Based on a well-informed first choice of participants, the strategy is designed to include participants of the first phase to be included as resources into the next. The priority tools are under constant scrutiny and the system is designed to be under continual improvement. Although complex, the phased implementation strategy may theoretically be easier to control in a school system such as Norway's, as it is divided into well-defined phases in comparison to full-scale changeover strategies. The focus on national coherence and clear centralized leadership of processes is reflected in the organizational chart for implementation by the Directorate for Education and Training (see Figure 3).

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

If we observe Figure 2 with the stakeholder perspective from Figure 1 in mind, we may assume that there are clear benefits to conducting system change in phases (e.g., extended time is available for adjustments). The strategy illustrates the potential benefit from an integration perspective, in which negative influences that arise at the start become less critical as new groups commence the program. The control of these processes is reflected in the large-scale involvement by the central authorities seen in Figure 3. The time provided for all stakeholders to adapt to new political signals is longer, thus allowing for the capacity-building over time and across groups that is needed if all implementing agents are to understand their practice and allow for change (cf. Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). The national and middle management staff may concentrate on part of the system or some of the stakeholders and better supervise the processes (cf. Moos, 2009). In phased implementation, it is not only the given groups of schools that define a phase. A phase is also defined by the embedding of knowledge and knowledge



infrastructure. In theory, the strategy risk decreases, the knowledge usability increases, and the implementation allows for a system that can be used operationally and then upgraded with smooth steps of transition. The functionality of each phase is designed so that each new phase in the strategy builds on insight from the preceding phase.

While there are potential benefits to phased implementation in Norwegian education policy development, there are certain challenges as well. The following two steps are crucial in order for this strategy to succeed: 1) the careful selection of participants for phase 1, as all the other phases learn from the success and failure of this group; and 2) the strategic placement of support structures to align phases and tools within, between, and across the four phases.

Regarding the first challenge, we have emphasized that in Norway the Directorate for Education and Training decided which school owners should be offered support for school-based development and by which higher education institutions. Since the strategy is still in the first phase it is difficult to assess if the selection criteria and processes have been optimal at this point in time.

The second challenge involves tools and structures to make all phases work towards the same aim. The phased approach relies on precise documentation and flexible use of tools across phases. A related dilemma might be unclear milestones, i.e., what is supposed to be achieved in each phase. Without well-defined milestones, the duration of the implementation as a whole might increase, as it is unclear when the “reform is finally over.” Another important precondition for the success of the implementation strategy is the clarification of roles and responsibilities. Good communication between participants such as counsellors, scholars and school owners is another prerequisite, as the aim is to involve all levels in the education system for all 1,295 lower secondary schools in Norway.<sup>4</sup> Explaining “what works” under different conditions of complexity requires supportive resources to ensure a long-term impact.

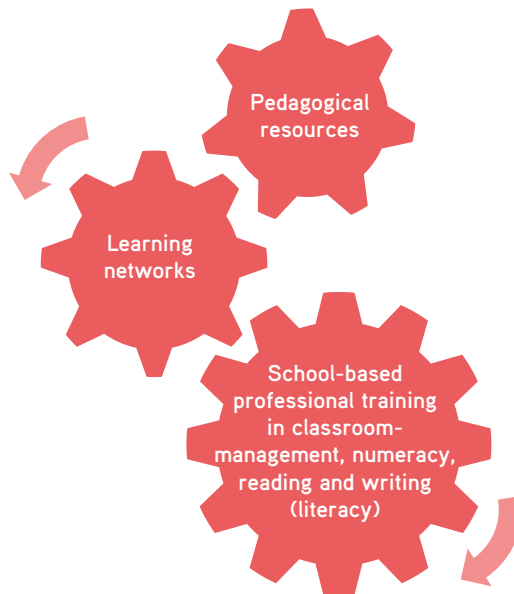
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<sup>4</sup>The Information System for Primary and Secondary Schools in Norway (GSI) indicates that per October 1st 2012, there were 614,894 students in Norwegian primary and lower secondary schools for the school year 2012/2013. In 2010-2012, there were 159 private schools in Norway, of which some were private but government funded. All in all, Norway spent 6.8 per cent of the gross domestic product on education according to UNDP numbers, while the average for the OECD countries was 5.9 per cent. There are 2,957 public and private primary and lower secondary schools in Norway, of which different combinations of schools equal 1,295 lower secondary schools. As mentioned, due to the scattered school system (low population/large geographical area), some schools in Norway combine different grade levels. Teacher density in Norway is 13.5 students per teacher. The discrepancy between this number and the number given on the introduction-page for the article, is caused by two different way of calculating teacher density.

## ALIGNING POLICY TOOLS IN PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

The aim of our evaluation of the strategy *Motivation and Mastery for Better Learning* is to provide insight into the degree to which the strategy tools are well-suited for optimal goal attainment within, between, and across phases of implementation. As seen in Figures 1 and 4, the three “meshing gears” represent the three main tools of support for the strategy stakeholders: School-based professional training in classroom management, reading, writing, and numeracy; pedagogical resources; and learning networks.

FIGURE 4: NATIONAL SUPPORT TOOLS IN THE NORWEGIAN STRATEGY FOR LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION 2013-2017 (CARLSTEN & MARKUSSEN, 2014; BASED ON MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, 2012).



When it comes to tools, some are seen as specific to the context of Norway, while others are shared by more members of the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE). One domestic example is the Norwegian group of 57 counsellors working across regions that we have referred to earlier. Because municipalities are too small to be self-sufficient in terms of competence and capacity, the national level allocates resources to regional counsellors. Another specifically Norwegian feature is the way the

authorities work with the higher education institutions. For a small country, Norway has 22 quite small higher education institutions, which requires that attention be paid to network strategies in all implementation strategies.

The phased implementation strategy in Norway illustrates a common European trend. This involves a shift from traditional implementation tools of “what works” in educational politics – legal, financial, and assessment (Aasen et al., 2012) – to an increased focus on informative and assessing or “soft” tools (Moos et al., 2013; Hudson, 2011; Postholm et al., 2013; Dyrvik et al., 2014). These soft tools align with a form of governance described as soft governance of education (e.g. Moos, 2009). Since the formal field of implementation research emerged in the 1960s, there has been a growing concern with the “what works” framework (Odden, 1991; Spillane et al., 2002). In past implementation research, the goal was to reveal that policy, people, and places affected implementation. In new approaches to implementation research, one aim is to uncover various dimensions and how interactions among these dimensions shape implementation in different ways (Honig, 2006). The Norwegian case might illustrate this shift in implementation theory in practice.

### CURRENT IMPACT OF PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

Understanding and evaluating the impact of this strategy is an important part of the strategy itself. If the claims in this chapter hold, that countries may learn from another and that Norway is illustrating a new shift in implementation theory, understanding the nature of implementation strategy today is therefore relevant for all stakeholders involved in the work of changing educational systems (Spillane et al., 2002; CIDREE, 2006; Wooldridge, Schmidt, & Floyd, 2008).

An important factor in examining the impact of implementation strategies is to reach an understanding of the benefits and risks of phased implementation as it meets the different agents of implementation at the local level. Questions regarding implementation for the development of lower secondary schools were therefore incorporated into the survey “Questions to Norwegian Schools” for the Directorate for Education and Training (Sjaastad, 2014). The study was conducted in the Spring of 2014 and included 380 schools with lower secondary classes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>A methodological discussion is found in Sjaastad 2014.



## EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESS?

Two hundred and two school leaders responded to a question regarding what they estimated the long-term impact of the strategy to be: “Do you believe that the arrangement ‘Strategy for Lower Secondary Education in Norway’ will be successful?” In the first report from the evaluation Spring 2014 (Sjaastad 2014), results show that school leaders overall have a positive attitude regarding the expected outcome and successful long-term effects of the strategy. The interesting finding in terms of phased implementation is that school leaders in phase 1 who are already working on the strategy seem to be more enthusiastic about the outcome than those who have not yet started this work (Sjaastad, 2014). Within this phase, school leaders expect more practical instruction (73%), more varied instruction (95%), and better pedagogical practice (91%) to take place.

School owners also responded to the question of long-term effects. Every school owner may be responsible for some 10+ schools, and these may belong to different groups. Sixty-two of the 102 school owners participating in the survey had no schools in phase 1. Thirty-nine school owners had between one and eight schools in phase 1, while one school owner had 15 schools in phase 1. A majority of school owners indicated a belief in changes in varied instruction (83%) and enhanced pedagogical quality (85%). Seventy-four percent regard the strategy as likely to reach its ambitions. Seventy percent of school owners expect long-term effects, agreeing with school leaders on this issue.

These indicators aiming at improving motivation and mastery in lower secondary schools in Norway might be considered attainable by school leaders at this stage. This finding will be analysed and re-examined in the upcoming surveys and interviews in our evaluation. It is interesting to note the optimism in school leaders’ responses on these indicators, given that former education policy implementation research in Norway has pointed to loose couplings between reform goals and local results in terms of student learning, e.g., test score improvements (Olsen & Skedsmo 2012).

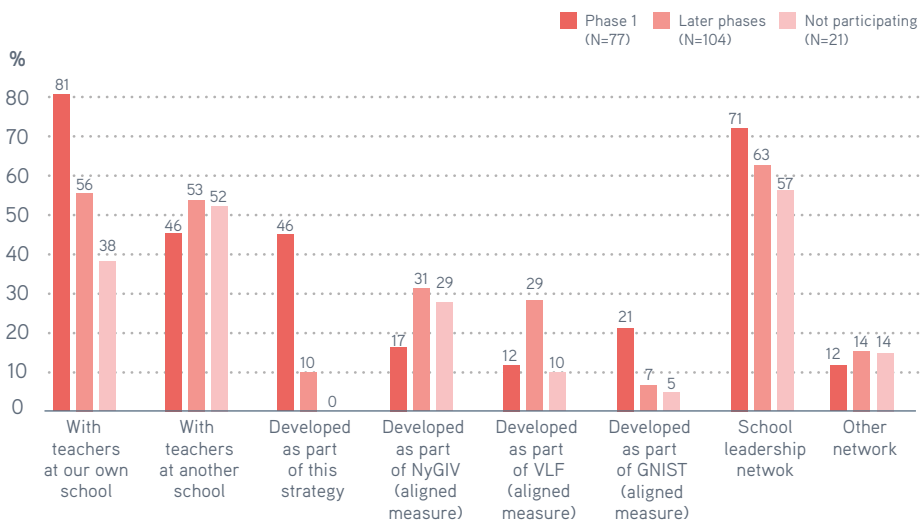


## TOOLS AND TRAINING

An important supportive tool in the strategy is participation in learning networks (see Figure 4).

There are three types of networks where schools in phase 1 deviate from the other groups: networks with teachers in their own schools, networks developed as part of this strategy, and existing networks developed as part of GNIST (Figure 5). Our data indicate that more schools in phase 1 participate in all networks. This might be a sign that the strategy assists in activating networks. It can also be a sign that those who do not participate belong to a group of schools owners that are not as involved in existing networks as those the Directorate selected for phase 1.

FIGURE 5: IN WHICH NETWORK DOES THE SCHOOL TAKE PART BASED ON PHASE PARTICIPATION? RESPONSE BY SCHOOL LEADERS. N = 202 (CARLSTEN & MARKUSSEN, 2014)<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup>NyGIV: New Possibilities (NyGIV) is a Norwegian national project to increase successful completion in Upper Secondary Education and Training from 70 to 75 percent. Improved cooperation between different levels of government and between different measures is central to the project. VLF refers to Assessment for learning.

It is interesting to note that school leaders participating in these networks have higher expectations regarding long-term effects in the areas of varied and practical instruction (Sjaastad 2014). They seem to believe that teachers' existing instructional patterns can be changed and that pedagogical practice will be strengthened. Nine out of ten believe in a change in their own level of school leadership. Ninety-one percent of school leaders in networks believe that this strategy will lead to better schools, while only 61% of those who do not participate in networks believe this (ibid). The impact of being in phase 1 is enhanced by participating in networks, which also seem to lead to increased belief in the effects of this strategy. The longer school leaders have participated in this strategy, the more they seem to understand its positive effects, according to our survey at this initial stage.

An area in which school owners and school leaders seem to disagree is the quality of mutual cooperation (Sjaastad 2014). Over half of school owners believe in lasting quality enhancement in their cooperation with schools, while only a third of school leaders expect the same.

### LINKING AMBITIONS AND RESOURCES

The implementation tools should integrate efforts within and between groups. We therefore examined stakeholder views on the relationship between the resources they have received and the ambitions they see as connected to this approach, asking for agreement or disagreement on the statement: "the amount of financial resources is sufficient to reach the aim of the strategy" (see Figure 6).

It is interesting to note that the school leaders in phase 1 seem to have participated sufficiently to provide such a decisive answer. The level of agreement is surprisingly high when we know that resources have been spread across many agents in the system and that school leaders are not among those who have received the larger share (Sjaastad, 2014).

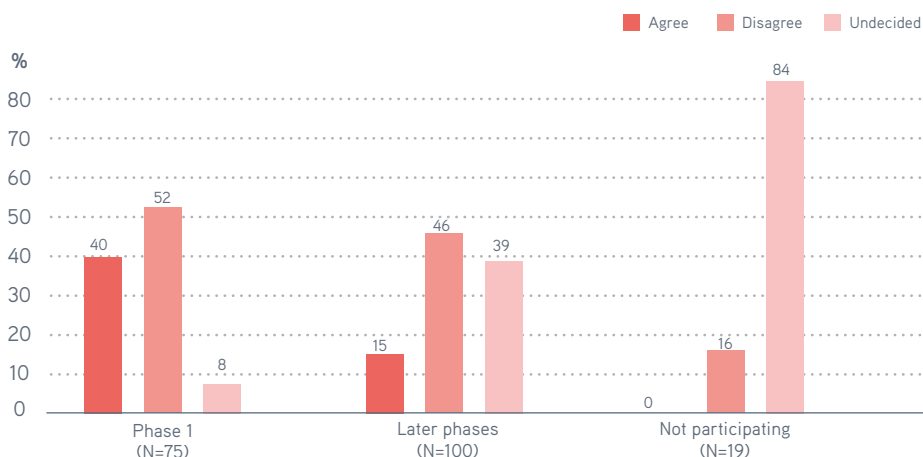
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GNIST: SPARK (GNIST) is a broad commitment to improving the quality of teacher education and developing the teaching profession in Norway. The partnership is working to raise the status of teachers and to recruit good teachers for 21st century education.

VLf: Assessment for learning – AfL (Vurdering for Læring) is a four-year Norwegian educational program (2010-2014) involving more than 400 schools. The main goal has been to improve assessment practices in Norwegian schools by working on integrating the four AfL principles into their teaching practice (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013).



FIGURE 6: STAKEHOLDER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND STRATEGY AMBITIONS ACCORDING TO PHASE PARTICIPATION. REPORTED BY SCHOOL LEADERS IN RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT: "THE AMOUNT OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES IS SUFFICIENT TO REACH THE AIM OF THE STRATEGY."  
 N = 194 (CARLSTEN & MARKUSSEN, 2014).<sup>7</sup>



## CONCLUSION

Strategic implementation is a fundamental step in the realization of society's expectations for education. The nature of schooling as a social system calls for updated knowledge on the benefits and challenges of different models of implementation. In Europe, a substantial amount of resources are allocated to examine the effects of continual implementation efforts. This chapter has addressed the initial stages of the implementation of the Strategy for Lower Secondary Education in Norway, paying particular attention to the benefits and challenges of the phased strategy.

Emphasizing the fact that we are in the initial stage of evaluating these efforts, we are careful not to encourage drawing definitive conclusions or generalizing from Norway to a European audience. At this point in our evaluation (which will go on for four more years) we do, however, have interesting survey responses from 202 school leaders and 62 school owners.

<sup>7</sup>The group answering "not participating" is a group containing schools that have not yet been assigned to a certain phase or schools that are uncertain of actual participation (see also Sjaastad, 2014).

The respondents in our survey – school leaders and school owners alike – provided very positive feedback as we are approaching the end of phase 1 and the start of phase 2 of the intended change in lower secondary education in Norway. Looking at responses from school owners and school leaders participating in an evaluating survey, the central tools in the framework – school-based development, pedagogical resources, and learning networks – seem to be surprisingly well-connected to the stated ambitions. The respondents expressed a positive outlook on further development even after the formal phase is over, possibly indicating the benefits of middle management and extended time periods of implementation in the phased strategy.

A few questions remain: would the positive feedback from school leaders in our survey have been different had another mode of implementation been used? Is the phased implementation strategy a remedy to the stated need for clarity of roles and responsibilities because it is more flexible? Is the new framework better aligned to professional needs and ways of daily school improvement than earlier reform efforts? Is the phased implementation type better aligned to the Norwegian education system with its scattered school geography and decentralized governance approach? We are also questioning the status of tools versus aims in the strategy: how may the impact of existing learning networks be compared to newly established learning networks in a system such as education? Are there other tools that would be better matched to the idea of phased implementation? We will be able to present more nuanced answers to these questions when the evaluation is complete in 2018.

As a field of research and practice, education policy implementation has been searching for strategic tools of implementation under the slogan “what matters is what works” (Vedung, 2010). Recent trends in implementation research also emphasize the importance of understanding the complexity of “what matters” and “what works” (see also Hopfenbeck et al., 2013). As Honig points out, implementability and success factors are obviously important outcomes of the policy implementation process, but the essential implementation question is not “what is implementable and works,” but “what is implementable and works for whom, where, when, and why?” (Honig, 2006). To communicate the “what matters” and explain how schools can reach goals of “what works” under different conditions



is currently something Norway seems to be exploring with surprisingly positive results. What may be unique about strategic implementation in this case and what may be comparable to other European countries would be a worthwhile research subject for the CIDREE-network in the years ahead.

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